

Second Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, and welcome to all of the distinguished experts who have come here for this Second Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. My purpose today is simply to welcome you and to perhaps set the scene for your discussions, which at this session are going to focus very much on the whole issue of public administration as a key element in the achievement of what we call the Millennium Development Goals.

There are eight broad goals in all. There are, of course, the goals that deal with poverty and hunger, the first goal. There are goals which deal with matters relating to education, health, and gender equality. There are certain goals which are specific for HIV/AIDS control. Also, people tend to forget this, but there is also a very important goal on environmental sustainability – a point I would emphasize, particularly in the context of the Johannesburg Summit. Most important of all, there is goal eight, which talks in terms of partnerships, which are necessary across national boundaries for the realization of all the goals. In goal eight there is a strong focus on issues such as aid trade and debt relief. But one of the aspects of the partnerships that we could encourage across national boundaries is precisely the type of exchange of national experiences and knowledge which a platform like this can facilitate.

The Millennium Development Goals came basically from the UN conferences processes of the 1990s. They were not negotiated in the Millennium Summit; they were negotiated earlier. They were a part of a whole political process of developing a shared programmatic framework in critical areas dealing with women, children population issues, environment, social progress, human settlements, and human rights. These were all separate conferences which dealt with a broad approach to each of the particular problems that they were trying to address.

One of the characteristics of the conferences of the 1990s was the growing emphasis on linkages between different areas. And it is for this reason that many of the Millennium Development Goals figured in more than one conference, because they were clearly relevant for all the different problematics. For instance, the goals which relate to education are relevant not just in the context of social progress; they are also relevant surely in the context of the children's summit or in the context of the women's conference and even in the context of sustainable development.

Many of the Millennium Development Goals have the characteristic of being crosscutting. They are relevant not just for the particular objectives that they directly serve, but for many of the other objectives which were outlined in the conferences of the 1990s. I stress this because I think that it has certain implications for your work when you start looking at issues of public administration. Now, when you start looking at this, the first thing one should emphasize is the importance of national ownership. The Millennium Development Goals are simply a framework. There are certain broad global goals which have been set, but they need to be translated into what they mean at the national level. Take, for instance, the whole goal of halving poverty by 2015. Now, one can start with this; but at the national level, and in fact in many countries even below the national level, this will have to be translated into more specific goals. For instance, goals which deal with those people who are landless, goals which deal with people living in urban areas, goals that deal with single-parent households, goals that deal with women advancement; all of these will fit into this broader goal of halving poverty. And those things cannot be specified globally. They have to be done at a national level.

So one of the first challenges for getting action on the ground to realize these goals is how do we have a process at the national level which will seek to do at the national level what in some ways the Millennium Development Goals exercise has done at the global level. And a great of the effort of the United Nations Development Programme and others at the national level is focused on this. To do this will clearly require us to address how and where in the system of public administration, both at the national level and

at the local level, this would be handled. This is one thing that I would stress as the first point: that there is a challenge in moving from these globally-agreed goals. Of course, they were agreed to by all the presidents and prime ministers who came here. That is, in that sense, the first level of national ownership. But that is not what we mean by national ownership. We also mean by national ownership that in terms of national, administrative and political processes, there is a process which translates this into what needs to be done at the local and national levels.

The second point that one would want to stress here is where in the system will public administration be dealt with. Are we going to say that the goal on education would be with the education ministry, the goal on health with the health ministry, the goal on poverty probably with the ministry of social welfare or rural development or whatever, the AIDS one again with health, the environmental sustainability perhaps with the environment ministry. Is that the way to handle this? Because in many ways, these are the agencies which have the line organizations under their command. So if results are to be secured at the field level, you clearly need the engagement of these line ministries. But there are two issues here which you need to address. One is, it is sad but true, that many of these line ministries dealing particularly with social and environmental issues at the national level are, at least politically, somewhat weaker than the apex ministries dealing with planning, finance or trade; or they are certainly weaker than the prime ministers or presidential offices. So if you want to put real drive into this process, should you be thinking in terms of locating the whole exercise in terms of national ownership in some apex organization? Would that exacerbate this, if you like political divide, between the apex powerful bodies at the national level and the line ministries, or is there some third solution which is possible? Again, one cannot think in terms of a single global answer. This has to be defined more clearly at the national level in terms of what would operate most effectively in each country.

But there is another dimension to this whole question of how you locate it, which I would like to stress, and that is of linkages. What we need to stress and emphasize is that, in many cases, the realization of one goal depends on the capacity to realize a similar goal in a completely different area. An example which I have always been most fond of is the example that in many parts of the world, if you want to improve the attendance of girls in school, one of the most useful things you can do is to improve water supply - because it reduces the amount of time which the women in the household would have to spend to go and get water. In many cases, in dry areas, they have to spend perhaps half a day to get water for the household. Change that and you improve the possibility of girls attending school. This has been demonstrated on the nutritional status of children and safe water supply, and one can multiply these examples. If you leave the issue of water supply and sanitation in one place and education in another place, will you secure these linkages, will you be able to ensure that you will do all of the other things which would help to make sure that girls attend school. There is such a strong correlation between the education of girls and women and a whole range of health-related goals. Take, for example, my country, the southern state of Kerala, which has a very high performance in terms of human development indices. It has been said that one of the most valuable things which was done was simply to educate the women to wash their hands and boil the water before feeding the children. It wasn't medication, it wasn't health care facilities, it was just simply sound education which delivered that result. These linkages are very important; and they become even more complex when you look at the goal of environmental sustainability, which is why conferences such as Johannesburg and others have such a complex agenda.

So, the second dimension that one needs to keep in mind in deciding where to locate this responsibility for translating these global commitments into national action should take into account the linkages between all of these different areas. Again, the answer to this will not be the same. In certain cases it may be the office of the prime minister or president; in other cases it may be a planning ministry; and in certain other cases it may be some other coordinating structure which is available. The question should be posed not simply in terms of what is it that we need to do at a global level. It is even more challenging to pose this question as to how will this operate at the village or the district level. In some ways, it is better to start there because that is where the linkage has to be realized. It is not simply that at a global level you try and match the funding for water supply and sanitation and girls' education; you have to

make sure at the village level that these things are combined. In many ways it would be more useful to start at that level and then work out what this means in terms of the global forces.

There is a third dimension that I want to stress here. I have talked in terms of linkages between goals, but there is a broader issue of coherence which is necessary to consider. Take, for instance, the whole goal of halving poverty. In most developing countries, this basically means looking at people in rural areas, and the largest proportion of those people are farmers. There is no way in which we can achieve this goal of halving poverty unless we substantially improve the income capacity of farmers. This certainly requires us to connect this goal with many of the other things that we would be doing on water supply and land development, but even more important, we would have to connect this with our policies on agricultural prices, on input prices, on marketing arrangements, and on local infrastructure development. That is what policy coherence is all about. What you need to connect is not just two specific goals; what you need to do is to ensure that the goals get factored into the mainstream of policy, and I do not mean a welfare add-on somewhere. You must reflect the goal of halving poverty when you design your agriculture support system, your spending on local infrastructure and so on.

How will this coherence be secured? This is not entirely an institution issue; it is partly also a methodological issue as to what is the best way of doing this. As one part of this, securing coherence is at the global level. At the global level we need to ensure that these goals are reflected not just in specific programmes dealing with these goals but in other areas of policy. An example, which was given before and which I repeat now, even though it may be a little controversial, is that of HIV/AIDS. We had a General Assembly special session which established certain goals on what we had to do to reverse the trends in HIV/AIDS. We also put those goals into the Millennium Declaration. It is not simply a matter of ensuring that these goals get reflected in specific programmes which deal with HIV/AIDS. Should we also not consider these goals when we are discussing, say, the issue of trade policy? Should we not take into account that these goals will not be realized unless we do what we said we were going to do in the Doha round with regards to pharmaceuticals required for this purpose? That, too, is an issue of coherence. On a more practical level, one issue of coherence which we need to worry about is translating the Millennium Development Goals into national action. This is not the only thing we are asking countries to do, there are other things: poverty reduction, strategies papers, national sustainable development strategies, United Nations development assistance framework, etc. It will clearly not make sense to have all of these different globally driven processes operating separately.

One of the aspects of coherence of mainstreaming we need to consider is how these Millennium Goals will also drive these other processes. Yes, they have these other processes, and have objectives and concerns which may look beyond the Millennium Development Goals. But coherence simply means that whatever you do in the globally-driven national strategy processes must be consistent with the Millennium Development Goals. Fortunately, this is increasingly accepted by the global agencies involved; and in many ways, one of the most valuable products of the Millennium Declaration is the way in which it is increasingly provides a shared framework for all agencies involved in supporting development, not just the United Nations, but the Bretton Woods Institutions and increasingly also many bilaterals. We should put our focus on the global level, but there are also similar issues at the national level of coherence and consistency between all of the different things which governments ask line ministries or local administrations to undertake.

In all of this, clearly the weakest need is sharing of experiences. In every single area that I mentioned, I do not see a single answer emerging from the global level. It has to be something which has to be worked out at the national level. I think that one of our jobs is to provide the opportunity for people to talk about this. Systems of public administration do differ from country to country, but they also have enough in common in terms of goals, objectives and even procedures for this type of exchange to be worthwhile. That is one of the purposes behind meetings such as the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. But beyond this, there may be a certain important role for what I would call capacity-building in developing countries, not through technical assistance, but in a variety of different ways, to support and help countries to build the capacities required for securing this type of political drive, this type of

consistency across actions in different areas, this type of coherence. In order to do this, one of the things that we have done over the past few months in the United Nations is to bring together the capacities which were available in the programme on public administration with the capacities that were available under the rubric of social development and what we call socio-economic governance. One of the things we did was to bring these two things together so we can provide, so to speak, a package. A package which talks both about procedural issues of public administration, civil service structures, civil service training, civil service reform, questions of transparency, accountability, along with substantive support to enhance the capacity of countries to realize the Millennium Development Goals.

Let me just conclude by saying that I focused on public administration because this is the purpose of this body. But lest I be misunderstood, let me stress that this is just one part of the exercise. There is much more that is going to be required in order to get these Millennium Development Goals realized. Public administration can facilitate, but what we really need is the political will to do all of the things that we need to do. When it comes to the provision of constitutional financial resources to developing countries, when it comes to debt relief, when it comes to providing market access, if you don't do those things, then whatever we may do in terms of capacity-building, strengthening the public administration will not deliver results. But we are wrong to believe that the only reason these goals have not been achieved is because of weaknesses of public administration. Yes, they may have been important, and making public administration structures more effective will help. But we must also recognize that one of the main reasons that did not happen was the enabling environment - the incapacity of countries to mobilize the resources that were required for these key goals. I would therefore end by saying that though it is not part of your agenda here, I would stress that what you do in some ways has to be seen in the broader context of a political will at every level from the global down to the local, or as we say, to put our money where our mouth is. I hope this is the message that will come out in the end from all the processes that we have for supporting the Millennium Development Goals. So I thank you, and I hope that your deliberations will help us. You started this process last year, you are continuing it this year, and I look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

Thank you very much.